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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Bush-Sharon Meeting

Key stories in the media:

In a banner headline and related article summing up the Crawford summit, Yediot cites Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's associates as saying that the prime minister's declarations on continued construction in the Maale Adumim E1 area may attest to the way the prime minister views Israel's moves after the Gaza disengagement: It is most probable that Sharon intends to initiate additional disengagement plans from the West Bank and evacuations of isolated settlements, they said. Sharon, who does not trust Abu-Mazen and the veteran Palestinian leaders, said political correspondent Shimon Shiffer, may seek to determine another national issue, intending to demarcate the permanent borders of the State of Israel. Kol Israel later quoted from a statement released by PM's bureau saying that the PM is not planning another unilateral move and that the reports to this effect are without any foundation. Yediot also reported that Sharon decided to upgrade Israel's activities in the matter of Jonathan Pollard, sending Ambassador Ayalon to visit him in his prison cell. Shiffer cites "reliable sources" as saying that they would not be surprised if Bush should decide to pardon Pollard as a gesture toward the Israeli public and a signal that the US fully supports the Sharon-led historic move of disengagement.

Israel Radio this morning reported that a Fatah militant who infiltrated into the Golan Heights from Syria was captured by IDF soldiers. In his investigation the militant said he intended to kidnap an IDF soldier.

Ha'aretz reported that at the end of the weekly discussion held at his office with top defense establishment officials regarding preparations for the disengagement, Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz instructed IDF officers yesterday to work on reaching agreements with settler leaders on collecting all army-issue weapons from settlers in the Gaza Strip and the northern West Bank communities slated for evacuation, shortly before implementation of the disengagement plan begins in late July.

Ha'aretz said a member of Fatah's military wing was killed yesterday in Nablus in an exchange of fire with a Border Police undercover unit. The Israel Defense Forces is preparing for a possible retaliatory strike from the organization.

Maariv carries a story on the upcoming visit to Israel by Russian President Putin, who is expected to arrive on 27 April. A political source involved in the "historic" visit says that although no one knows how the decision to visit Israel was made, possibly Putin is either trying to avoid criticism in Russia (related to former Russian mogul Khodorkovski's verdict), or trying to bolster Russia's international standing.

Yediot Aharonot reported that upon Russia's request, former GSS officers are training Russian Education Ministry security services in school protection in an Israel-sponsored course.

Citing US sources, Ha'aretz related that shareholders of heavy equipment maker Caterpillar this week rejected a proposal that called on the company to examine the

sale of its bulldozers to Israel due to their use in the demolition of Palestinian homes. This is the second attempt by U.S. groups to block machinery sales to Israel, the paper said.

Ha'aretz and other media reported that Attorney General Menachem Mazuz closed the Greek Island case against Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his son Gilad. He instructed State Prosecutor Eran Shendar yesterday to remove bribery charges from David Appel's indictment. The charges against Appel were related to the Greek Island case, in which Sharon, Industry and Trade Minister Ehud Olmert, and former Environment Ministry director general Nehama Ronen allegedly received bribes. With yesterday's decision, the Sharon bribery affair has come to an end.

Bush-Sharon Meeting:

Summary:

Political columnist Caroline B. Glick writes in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "Not only has US policy of safeguarding the PA while insisting on further Israeli land concessions to the PA made terrorism the choice of the Palestinian electorate, but Ariel Sharon's decision to go along with the US has made him chart a policy course that leads, as he stated so well a decade ago, to grave dangers to Israeli democracy."

Senior diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote from Washington in mass-circulation, independent Yediot Aharonot: "The Israeli-US relations are experiencing an unprecedented blooming.... But not everything is rosy. Not everything is good. A drama is brewing behind the scenes. The defense establishments of both countries, so closely tied in cooperation, are being ripped apart by a serious and every worsening crisis: the Amos Yaron affair."

Block Quotes:

11. "Bush vs. Democracy"

Extreme right-wing columnist Caroline B. Glick wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (April 15): "As irony would have it, democracy is now the biggest threat facing the so-called peace process between the Palestinian Authority and Israel.... The thing is, both the US and Israel are largely responsible for the current political realities in the PA -- where not only are all major political parties also terrorist organizations, but the relative popularity of each party is directly proportional to the volume of terror attacks it has carried out.... The overwhelming majority of Palestinians believes that it was terrorism that forced Sharon to move to withdraw Israeli forces from Gaza and northern Samaria.... So there we have it: not only has US policy of safeguarding the PA while insisting on further Israeli land concessions to the PA made terrorism the choice of the Palestinian electorate, but Ariel Sharon's decision to go along with the US has made him chart a policy course that leads, as he stated so well a decade ago, to grave dangers to Israeli democracy.... Is the Middle East democratizing? Certainly not in our neck of the woods."

12. "When Ariel Met George"

Senior diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote from Washington in mass-circulation, independent Yediot Aharonot (April 15): "The alliance between the two leaders [U.S. President Bush and Israeli PM Sharon] is what currently drives the Middle East. The Americans placed their bets on Sharon. He is the horse they are betting on and they will do everything they can to see him win. In this respect, the Texas and Washington visits delivered the goods. Bush's friendship, warmth, closeness, and 'how can I help you?' toward Sharon made the Israelis melt.... The Israeli-US relations are experiencing an unprecedented blooming.... But not everything is rosy. Not everything is good. A drama is brewing behind the scenes. The defense establishments of both countries, so closely tied in cooperation, are being ripped apart by a serious and every worsening crisis: the Amos Yaron affair."

CRETZ